

she must still report to the authorities every 15 days and cannot leave the country or speak to the news media. Incredibly, Venezuela's Attorney General denied in Geneva there was a complaint for sexual abuse and torture involving Afuni.

I know U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power has taken on this case. I want to join that effort and call for her unconditional release and exoneration.

Venezuelan President Maduro is presiding over the near collapse of his once proud nation, manufacturing internal and external enemies to explain his own government's economic mismanagement.

Not only has his government sentenced Lopez to jail, but it has also started a border dispute with Colombia, embarrassingly trying to further deflect attention from its own disastrous policies.

Furthering more division and repression will only make things worse. I know this administration and others in the region have tried to offer paths forward for Maduro, but I fear he is heading in the opposite direction with Lopez's sentencing.

Now, some of you may remember the international outrage that occurred when writer and activist Raif Badawi was sentenced to 1,000 public lashes and 10 years in prison on blasphemy and apostasy charges in Saudi Arabia.

You may also recall his brother-in-law and lawyer, human rights activist Waleed Abu al-Khair, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison by Jeddah's specialized criminal court for inciting public opinion and undermining the state.

These imprisonments—and both their dubious charges and inhumane punishments—were denounced around the world by reputable human rights organizations, foreign governments, and many others.

Our State Department called for the release of both Raif and Waleed, and in Congress, I was joined by seven of my Senate colleagues in writing to the late King Abdullah urging their release. Sixty-seven of my colleagues in the House did the same months later when King Salman became the new leader of Saudi Arabia. And just the other day, Badawi was awarded the PEN Literary Award.

We have a longstanding friendship with the Saudi regime, and friends do at times disagree. But it is because of the nature of our friendship that I believe we have an obligation to encourage Saudi Arabia to do better—to uphold basic human rights for free speech, for women, for religious minorities, for foreign workers, and countless others.

I hope the new King, King Salman, will show compassion and bring an end to Saudi Arabia's troubling human rights record.

And last, let me mention some hopeful steps in Belarus, where recently the last candidate who ran in 2010 for President against strongman President

Lukashenko, was finally released from jail.

Michael Statkevich was released after nearly 5 years and, coincidentally, just days after he had passed the deadline to be an eligible opposition candidate for the next Presidential election.

You see on the eve of the 2010 election—an election that could have brought an end to the distinction of being the last dictatorship in Europe—Lukashenko had seven candidates arrested and thrown in jail—not much of an incentive to be a candidate.

Sadly, such repression and election manipulation has been the norm in Belarus which incredibly still operates its own KGB to enforce political repression.

However, Belarus has another election coming up next week on October 11. I want President Lukashenko to know that the world is watching and hoping that this time it will be a free and legitimate election worthy of the Belarussian people.

#### REMEMBERING PAT JOHNS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last month, Illinois—and America—lost a legend. Pat Johns passed away at the age of 66. Pat Johns was from my home State of Illinois. He was born in Aurora and raised in Plano. Known as the "Master of Disaster," Pat was employed with Catholic Relief Services, based in Baltimore, for 30 years. In that time he was on the ground in some of the world's most dangerous war zones and humanitarian emergency areas.

Pat Johns was a soldier, but not in the traditional sense—he didn't even carry a gun. He was a soldier of peace, armed only with the virtue of his mission. And his mission took him to places like the killing fields of Cambodia, the Ethiopian famine, the Rwandan genocide, Somalia, Kosovo, and Eritrea. And when natural disasters occurred like the Asian tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, or the earthquake in Haiti, Pat Johns was there—with energy, hope, and solutions.

In 1974, Pat joined Catholic Relief Services and was posted in Cambodia. Two years later, he was managing a staff of 400 people. To say that Pat faced a challenge in Cambodia would be a gross understatement. The Khmer Rouge Army was storming its way toward the capitol of Phnom Penh and the Vietnam war was raging next door. Pat's job included working shifts of 50 hours or more and getting food and supplies to nearly 2 million refugees seeking safe haven from the Khmer Rouge's advances. He endured miserable tropical weather and survived malaria, all while keeping tens of thousands of refugees alive. When asked about the experience, he said, "The whole experience, in Cambodia really drove home my niche in life."

Many may have quit, but not Pat Johns. Instead, he dedicated his life to

serving those in desperate need in the most dangerous parts of the planet. In doing so, Pat Johns saved millions of people from war-torn countries, fed the starving, and promoted peace and justice all over the world—what an inspiration.

Last spring, I gave the commencement address at my nephew's high school graduation. I asked the students to think about what they wanted people to say about their lives. I asked them, "What will you be remembered for? What service did you render to your community? Your nation? Your world?" The great thing about living in America is we can choose the answers to those questions.

Pat Johns will be remembered for many things: living through war, famine, natural disasters, incredible human suffering; and for bringing hope to victims everywhere he went. But Sean Callahan, chief operating officer for Catholic Relief Services, put it best. He said, "Perhaps the greatest thing about Pat was that he was a gentleman and a greatly caring person. He could work nonstop for 50 hours in terrible conditions, but still have the heart to offer comfort and friendship to those around him." That's a legacy to be proud of.

Today, the best way we can honor Pat Johns is by continuing his life's work. We need this generation of Americans to live up to the example set by Pat Johns. We have big shoes to fill, but Pat showed us that, with the right commitment, we can get it done.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, we have all been deeply shaken by the horrific tragedies in Charleston and Roseburg and by all the mass killings that now occur with alarming regularity. The American people overwhelmingly support commonsense reforms that will keep firearms out of the hands of criminals and dangerous individuals; yet in response to mass shootings, too often Congress slips into a familiar cycle of shock, sorrow and, ultimately, inaction. Some in Congress pretend that there are no solutions; others claim that any restriction aimed at keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous people represents an affront to the Second Amendment. They are wrong.

Many, many Americans have had enough. We will not be satisfied by those who only offer their sympathies. And we will not be lulled into inaction.

While I was chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee last Congress, we addressed gun violence head-on. In the wake of the horrifying and senseless murder of 26 people, including 20 children, at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, CT, I and all Democratic members on the committee resolved to pass sensible reforms to protect our communities. We were moved by the powerful words of former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords calling on us

to act, and we reported out legislation that would punish criminals who traffic in firearms and would close background check loopholes. This included my bipartisan legislation to prevent criminals from using straw purchasers who exploit weak background check laws in order to funnel firearms to criminals. Our efforts were strongly supported by the American public, but Senate Republicans blocked these commonsense reforms on the Senate floor.

It has been more than 3 months since Democratic members of the Judiciary Committee called for a hearing in the wake of the tragedy in Charleston, SC. I hope the majority will soon schedule this hearing so that we can have a constructive discussion on gun violence that has shaken too many communities and too many families. But if we truly want to make a difference, we must work together to build consensus around solutions to gun violence. I will work with anyone interested in preventing these tragedies, and I will soon reintroduce my legislation to strengthen our straw purchasing and firearm trafficking laws.

Like many Vermonters, I grew up with firearms, and I have enormous respect for the freedoms the Second Amendment protects. None of the concepts put forward by the Democratic caucus threaten the Second Amendment rights of lawful gun owners. But American lives are threatened when our laws do not protect them. This need not be a partisan issue, and we must work together.

Our country desperately needs meaningful reform now. The toll that gun violence takes on our communities is too great. It is past time for Congress to act. The American people should not have to wait until the next tragedy.

#### JUSTICE FOR WAR CRIMES IN SRI LANKA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, earlier this week the distinguished ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator CARDIN, spoke about the opportunity for the United States and Sri Lanka to expand economic and security cooperation and the need for accountability for war crimes and reconciliation between ethnic and religious factions in that country. I want to join him in expressing support for the aspirations of the Sri Lankan people for reconciliation, justice, and equitable economic development.

Last week the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution which, if faithfully implemented, could be the basis for a meaningful and long overdue international role in Sri Lanka to hold accountable those involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity during that country's brutal civil war.

After so many false starts, so many investigations and reports that documented widespread atrocities by both sides in the conflict, including rape, arbitrary detention, torture, the use of

child soldiers, summary executions, shelling of civilians, and forced disappearances were ignored; and after recommendations to bring those responsible to justice were ignored, the U.N. resolution affirms that the Sri Lankan Government needs to put in place a judicial mechanism with international participation.

The resolution refers to the recent report by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which documented horrific abuses by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces and LTTE rebels and the government's failure over decades to punish those responsible. Among the report's key recommendations is the establishment of a special court "integrating international judges, prosecutors, lawyers and investigators" with an independent Sri Lankan investigative and prosecuting body. No other mechanism would have the credibility and independence to deliver real justice.

Let me repeat that because it is so important: No other mechanism would have the credibility and independence to deliver real justice. The refusal of past Sri Lankan Governments to accept this premise and to recognize that no one, including the armed forces, is above the law, is why so far no one has been held accountable.

To its credit, President Maithrapala Sirisena's government cosponsored the resolution, which was presented initially to the U.N. Human Rights Council by the United States, United Kingdom, Montenegro, and Macedonia. The resolution, regarding a "credible judicial process," "affirms the importance of participation in a Sri Lankan judicial mechanism, including the Special Counsel's office, of Commonwealth and other foreign judges, defense lawyers, and authorized prosecutors and investigators." Having cosponsored the resolution, the government should establish without delay a special tribunal that brings together international investigators, prosecutors, and judges with Sri Lankan counterparts who are protected from outside pressure and intimidation, as well as a program to protect witnesses. The United States could provide assistance for such an effort.

The government will also need to ensure that violations of international law, including war crimes, disappearances, torture, and the concept of command responsibility, are incorporated into Sri Lankan law, so that charges brought reflect the severity of the crimes and target those most responsible.

I have spoken previously about President Sirisena's initial accomplishments, including the adoption of the 19th Amendment to the constitution, which curtails the extensive powers enjoyed by the Executive and vests more power in the parliament, limits the Presidential term to 5 years instead of 6, and allows the President to hold office only for two terms instead of an unlimited number of terms.

Unlike the previous government, which persecuted its critics and locked up after sham trials journalists who exposed corruption, President Sirisena has taken steps to reaffirm freedom of the press. Under the previous government, Sri Lanka's judicial system was politicized and corrupted. The new government is taking steps to reestablish the independence of the judiciary, which is fundamental to any democracy. And, as has been reported, the Government of Sri Lanka has accepted many recommendations to improve the human rights situation, including a repeal of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act and reforms to the Witness and Victim Protection Law, both long called for by victims' rights groups. The government has agreed to accelerate the return of lands confiscated by the security forces; to end the military's involvement in civilian activities in the country's north and east; to investigate allegations of attacks on civil society, the media, and religious minorities; and to work toward devolution of authority from Colombo, consistent with the 13th amendment to the constitution.

President Sirisena has sought to erase the worst excesses and abuses of his predecessor and put his country on a path to reconciliation and prosperity. For this he deserves our support. The sooner the government makes good on these commitments, the better, as the Sri Lankan people have waited a very long time for a government that is serious about reconciliation, which means addressing the ethnic, religious, social, economic, and political divisions and inequalities that were at the root of the conflict.

The U.N. resolution is far from perfect. It has been pointed out that it lacks adequate provisions for international oversight of implementation of its terms. The resolution only calls for an oral update from the High Commissioner in June 2016 and a written implementation report in March 2017. The United States should not wait until next June to report to Congress on the government's progress in complying with the terms of the resolution. Despite its shortcomings, the U.N. resolution points the way forward. A great deal of work lies ahead. More than 6 years have passed since the war ended. Physical evidence has been lost or destroyed, people's memories fade, and witnesses die. But the Sri Lankan people, and particularly those who suffered grievous losses in the war, should take solace from the fact that the international community has not forgotten them and that their own government may be ready to take the necessary steps to restore accountability and the rule of law to Sri Lanka.

#### PALESTINIAN TERRORISM

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, my thoughts and prayers are with the Israeli people who are enduring a new escalation of Palestinian terrorism.